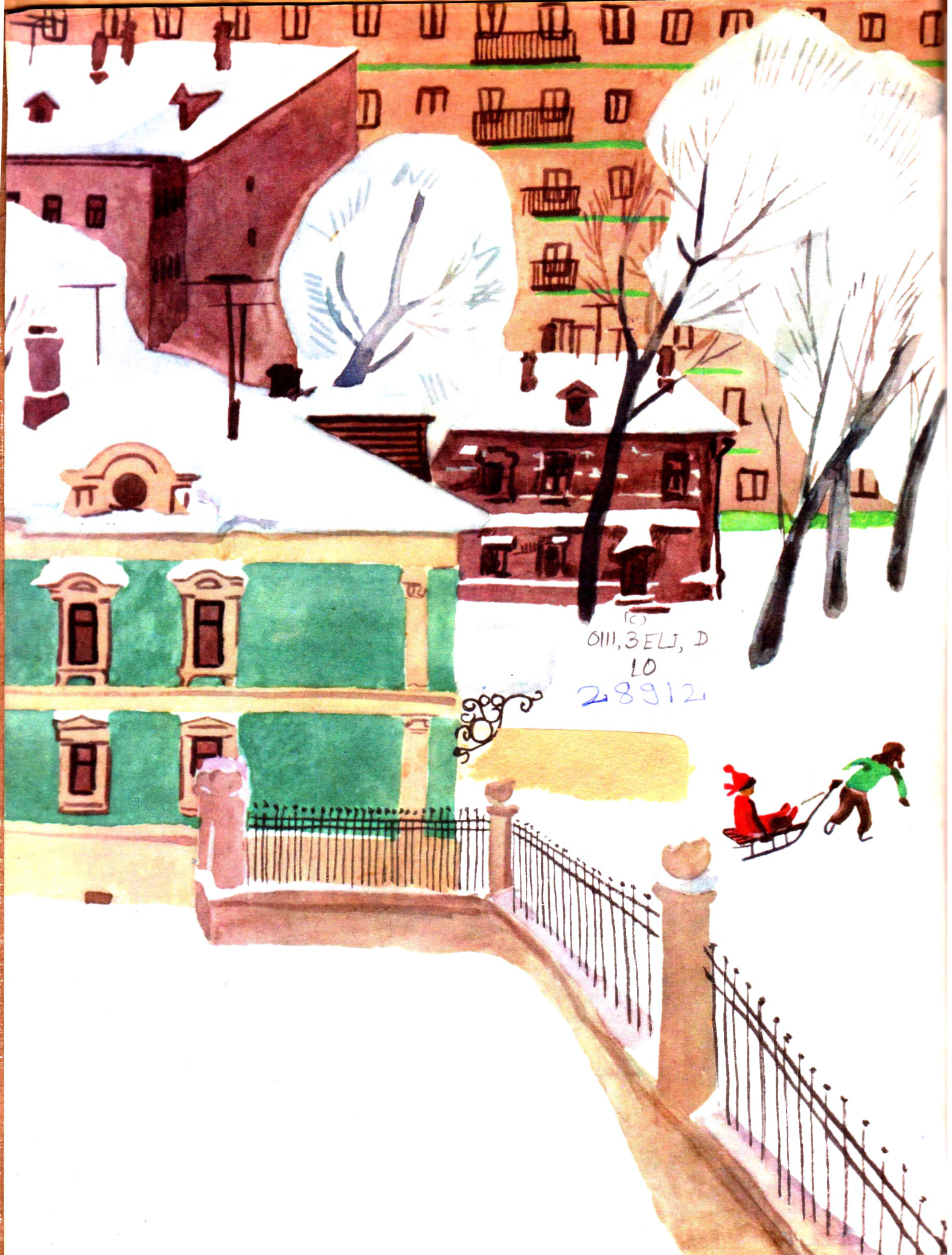
N. ELINSON

DOWN OUR STREET



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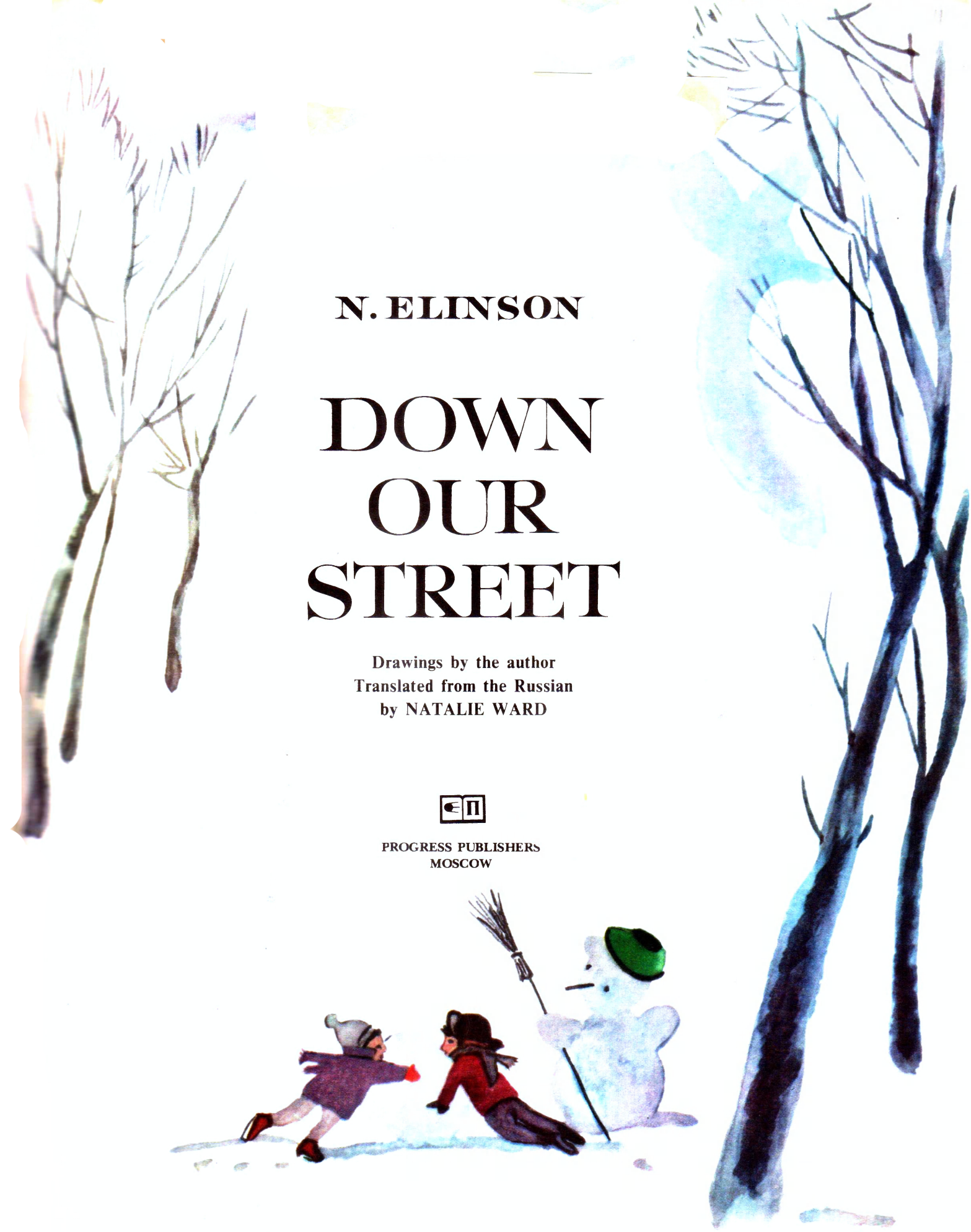

N. ELINSON

DOWN OUR STREET

Drawings by the author
Translated from the Russian
by NATALIE WARD

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THE CHAMP

One day a great big ball waddled onto our playground, wearing a fur coat, felt boots and fur mittens.

All the children crowded round it at once, but the ball hid behind its huge woolly scarf, and so no one could make out whether it was a boy or a girl under all those clothes.

"Who are you?" asked Marina at last. Marina was the most daring of all the girls in our gang.

And from deep inside the woolly scarf, from somewhere miles away, came a voice:

"I'm Pete."

And so we understood that it was a boy.

"Hey, kids!" cried Marina, delighted. "What a wonderful goalie he'd make — on top of being fat, he's so well wrapped-up that he'd stop all the goals."

"Yes, I can ... goal," said Pete.

Unhurriedly rolling from foot to foot, the ball set off home for his skates and returned at the same slow pace to strap them onto his felt boots.

They shoved a hockey-stick into his hands and left him to it.

The play was furious, Pete filled the goal completely with his bulk. Any puck that hit him bounced off his clothes, as if by magic.

If only it weren't for his feet!

They kept getting in the way, setting off in different directions, in short ruining everything.

At the decisive moment of the game the goalie flailed about and fell flat on the ice.

While his legs were waving desolately in the air, a puck whizzed towards the goal.

Then Pete pushed himself up with his hands — and ended up inside the goal together with the puck.

"It's my skates," he grumbled, "they're blunt, they skid about. And the ice is too slippery."

"Oh dear," sighed the gang, "you won't make a goalie."

"But I can ski," said Pete.

And fetched his skis from home.

It all went fine. Pete moved his feet ever so carefully, so as not to slip over.

But then he set off downhill. Suddenly the skis bounded into the air, broke loose and set off on their own.

Pete also shot into the air, like an acrobat, did a few somersaults and rolled after his skis.

He caught up with them at the bottom of the slope.

"I never did have any luck in winter," he said. "I better wait till summer."

The snow melted. The ground thawed out and the grass grew green. Up came the flowers, seeking the spring sun.

Out came the kids with a football.

Pete walked self-importantly round the horizontal bar. Then he summoned all the agility he had, jumped up, grabbed for the bar with his hands and hung there like a sack.

A second passed, then another. Pete went on hanging.

"Jump!" we yelled. In reply Pete yelled: "What are you just standing there for? Get me down!"

And we had to get him down, heavy as he was.

"This isn't my sport, either. Now football is another matter."

Running round a football field wasn't too easy for Pete, either. We decided to make him goalie again. This time his feet shouldn't skid about, now that it was summer.

Pete took up his stand sideways-on to the goal. He peered absent-mindedly about until his eyes lighted on the ball and started to draw it, like a magnet, towards the goal. The other side scored goal after goal.

"No," admitted Pete disappointedly, "this isn't my sport, either."

And he left the field.

"Perhaps he'd do better at swimming?" someone suggested.

The lake was looking very beautiful, with lilies and bullrushes. The frogs were croaking for all they were worth. But suddenly they became inaudible, not because they had given up croaking but because of a wail from Pete:

"Help! I'm drow-ow-ow-owning!"

We fished him out of the water.

"Have you ever thought of underwater swimming?" asked Marina. "It's ever so good, you know, with flippers and an aqualung...."

"Oh, I can do **that**," said Pete, still panting from his fright.

But oddly enough he hasn't put in an appearance down our street since then.

Now why do you think that should be?

POOR OLD GALYA

Don't be taken in by Galya's rosy cheeks: in fact she's always being taken ill, and each time more unexpectedly than the last.

First it was her hand—she even needed a bandage on it that time. That was just before the arithmetic test.

"Is it very painful?" asked the teacher.

"Very!"

"You couldn't write at all?"

"Not at all," said Galya.

It caused Galya great distress. She sat restlessly at her desk and sighed ever so often.

"Poor old Galya," said the teacher with sympathy. "Don't take it to heart so. I'll test you on your own later."

A few days later Galya came to school with a bandaged neck. She couldn't speak at all, only whisper.

"What's the matter, tonsillitis?" asked the teacher.

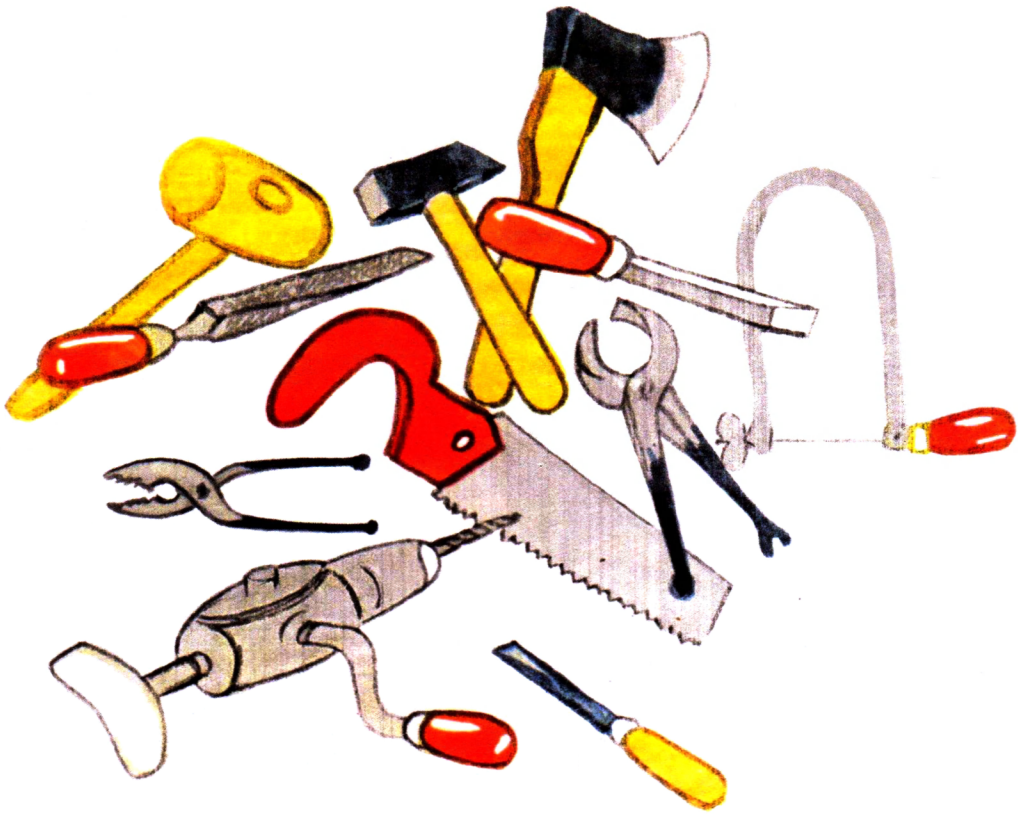
"No, catarrh," whispered Galya almost inaudibly.

"Dear oh dear," said the teacher, "and I was going to call you out to the blackboard today, too!"

When the time came round for the sports tournament Galya hurt her foot, and that had to be bandaged, too. All were agreed that poor Galya was just plain unlucky.

The other children ran and jumped, but Galya had to sit on one side, looking wistfully on.

But afterwards the teacher called her over and asked:
"I say, your eyes don't hurt, do they?"
"No," said Galya.
"And they never hurt before?"
"No."
"Well, when they start," said the teacher, "then you must bandage them up too. Then we'll all be able to see that at last you're ashamed to look us in the face."



THE HELPING HAND

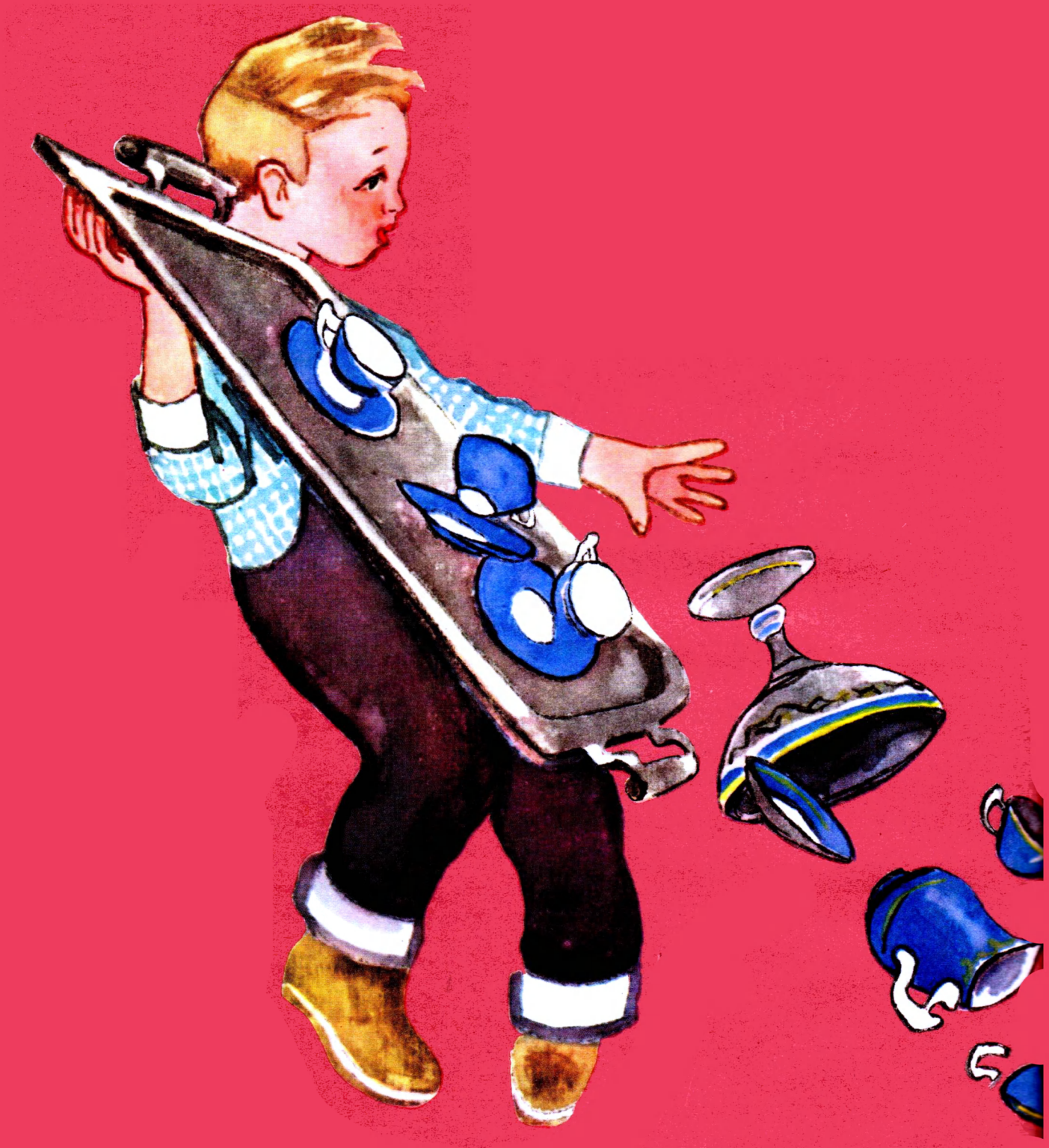
"Your hands ought to be clever hands, but they're like two lumps of wood," said his father. "You must have heard of workers with 'hands of gold'?"

Little Alyosha looked sadly at his hands: true, there was nothing golden about them at all.

But why had his father said "wood"? They were ordinary hands, just like anyone else's.

"Just suppose, by some off-chance," went on his father, "that someone needed your help, and you weren't able to give it. You weren't prepared for it and couldn't do what was needed."

"But you always say nothing happens by chance in life," said Alyosha.



But something like that **did** happen!

Alyosha learnt from his mother that they were moving into a new flat. This unexpected piece of news was a source of great joy and excitement.

And his father was away on business in just the week when they were supposed to make the move. That was "chance" for you all right.

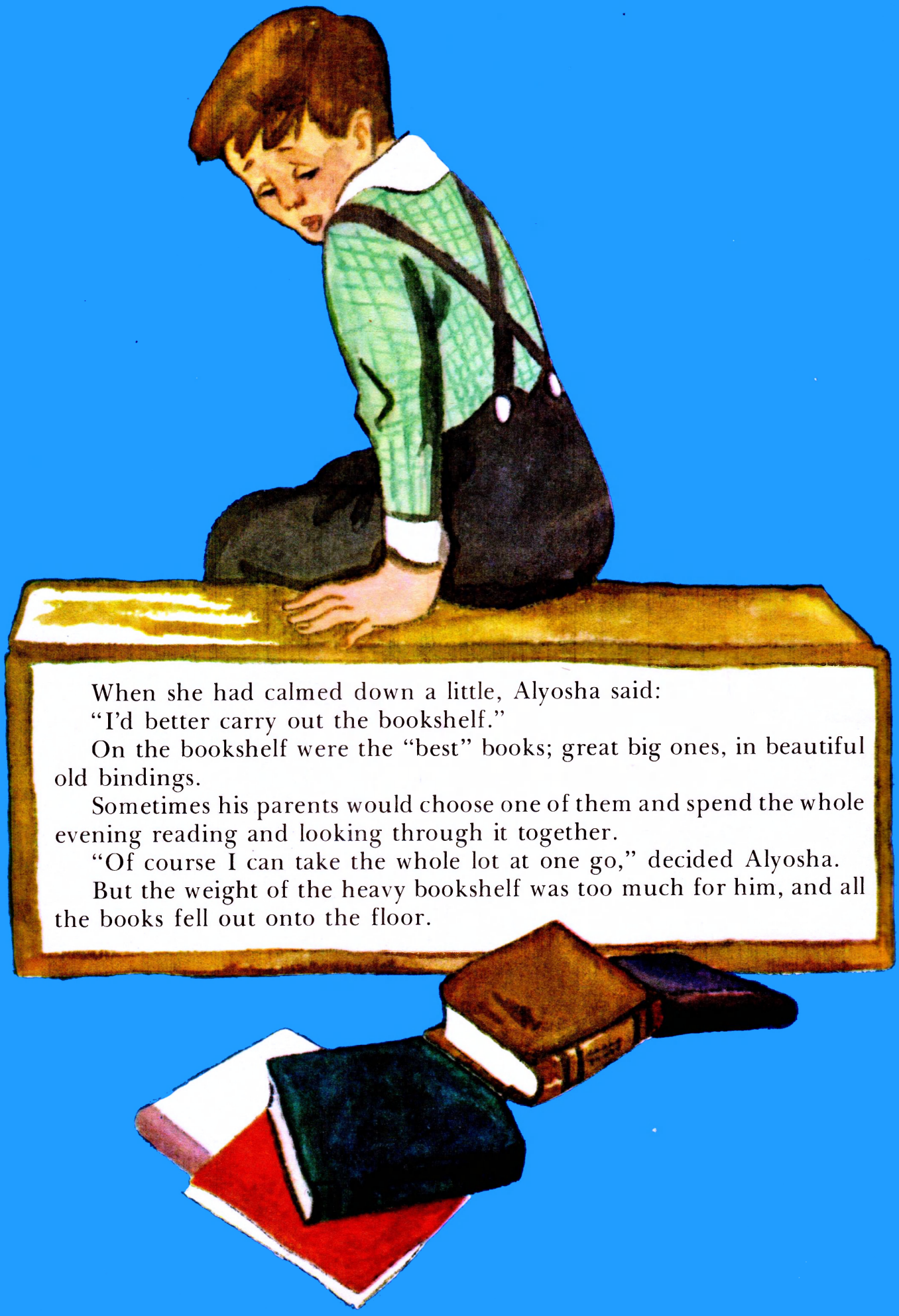
"Never mind," said his mother brightly, "**you**'ll help me."

Alyosha decided to prove to his mother just how capable he was.

"Are we going to carry everything out into the corridor?" he asked, business-like, as she was packing the china.

Without giving her time to answer he grabbed a trayful of cups, jugs and vases from their cherished old tea service. The tray rocked in his hands and the remains of the crockery scattered in smithereens all over the floor.

"Well, that **was** helpful," sighed his mother.



When she had calmed down a little, Alyosha said:

"I'd better carry out the bookshelf."

On the bookshelf were the "best" books; great big ones, in beautiful old bindings.

Sometimes his parents would choose one of them and spend the whole evening reading and looking through it together.

"Of course I can take the whole lot at one go," decided Alyosha.

But the weight of the heavy bookshelf was too much for him, and all the books fell out onto the floor.

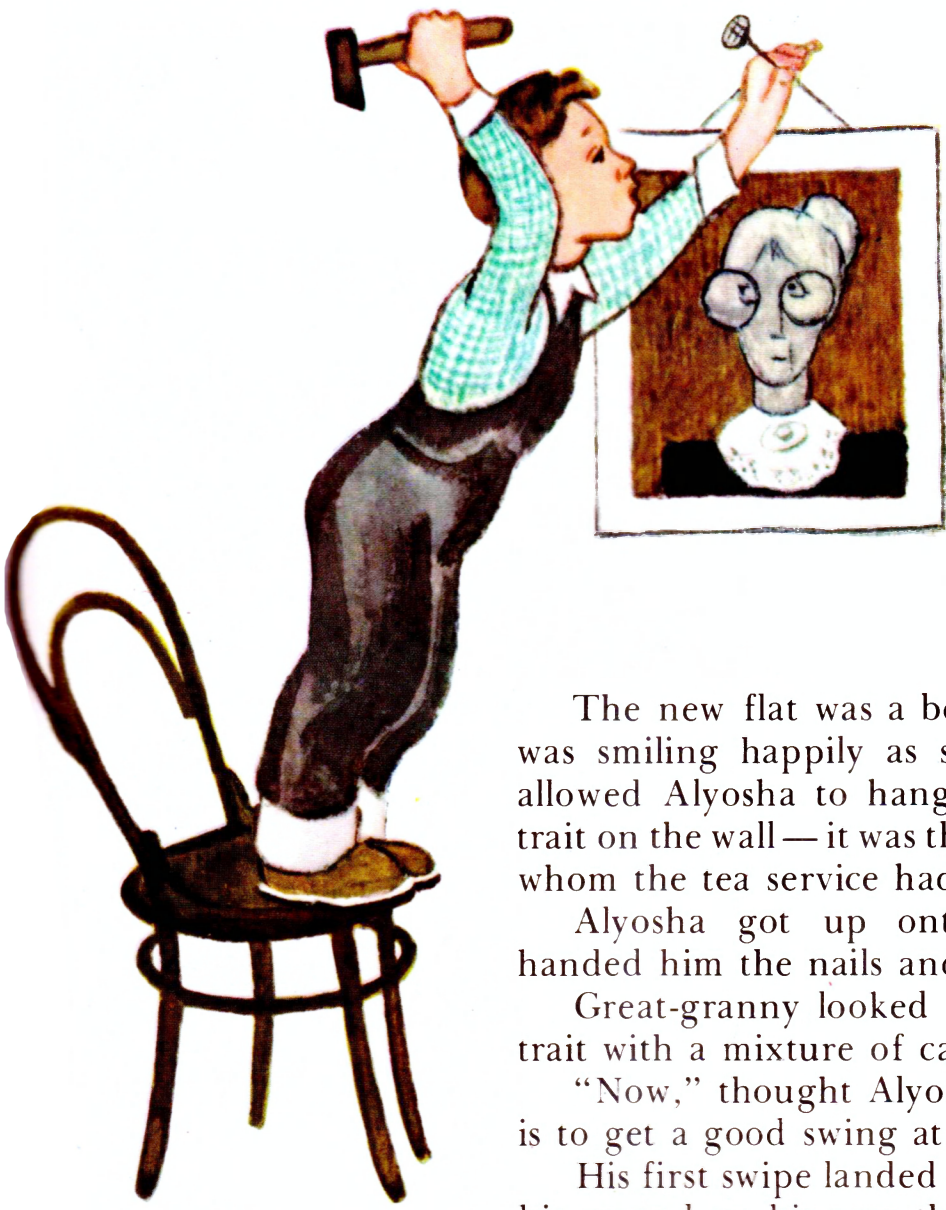
A few days later the furniture van came.

"Take your satchel down to the van," said his mother, "and then gather up all your toys and take them out too."

Alyosha made a bundle of his toys and started to take them down. Further down the stairs the removal men were lugging a wardrobe.

And then, would you believe it? Alyosha's bundle came undone, and all the toys fell on the men's heads!

"Who's that flinging his toys about?" they cried.



The new flat was a beautiful one. Mother was smiling happily as she explored it. She allowed Alyosha to hang great-granny's portrait on the wall — it was the same great-granny whom the tea service had belonged to.

Alyosha got up onto a chair. Mother handed him the nails and a hammer.

Great-granny looked down from the portrait with a mixture of caution and mistrust.

"Now," thought Alyosha, "the main thing is to get a good swing at it."

His first swipe landed on great-granny, and his second on his own thumb.

It hurt so much that he fell off the chair. He didn't let great-granny's portrait go, but even so he managed to crack both the frame and the glass.

"No, they're not like wood, your father's wrong," said his mother, "they're like stones, your hands. You break everything you touch."

"Oh, Mum, do let me put the bulbs into the new light," begged Alyosha. "That I do know how to do. I've already done it at school."

They put a stool on the table. Alyosha got up onto it and started putting in the bulbs.

He was trying so hard that he lost his balance, whereupon he grabbed for the new light and the next moment he was swinging on it like a trapeze artist.

The bulb he was holding flew out of his hand and broke on the floor below.

"You know, if this goes on much longer, you'll drive me mad," said his mother.

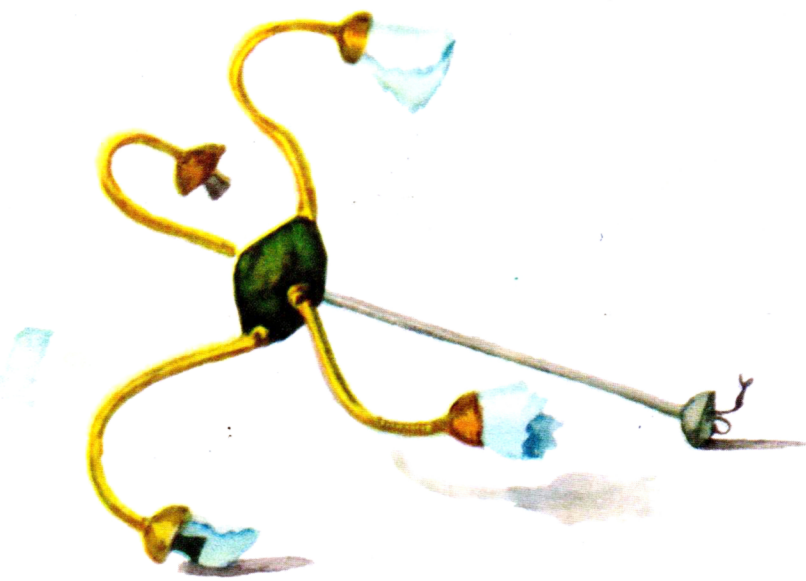
But she didn't get the chance to go mad, for father came back from his trip, bringing with him a large package.

"Well, how are things, sonny?" he asked.

Alyosha hung his head.

"I see," said his father. He opened the package and brought out a case, which Alyosha saw was full of shining new tools: a chisel, a file, a plane and a drill.

"These'll teach your hands to work properly," said father.



Н. ЕЛИНСОН

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